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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ATHENS 000427

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TAGS: OSCE PGOV PREL PHUM KRIF GR AF ZL

SUBJECT: GREECE/OSCE: BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS ON 2009

CHAIRMANSHIP - ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Classified By: DCM Tom Countryman for 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is a joint Embassy Athens/USOSCE Cable.

¶2. (C) Summary. USOSCE Ambassador Finley, EUR A/DAS Robbins, and Embassy Athens and USOSCE personnel met March 17 with Greek officials to consult on Greek plans for the upcoming 2009 Chairmanship of the OSCE. The Greeks have identified key personnel for the Chairmanship, and have begun thinking about their priorities. They plan to reappoint the three Personal Representatives on Tolerance - although they want further dialogue on the "personalities" and "support structures" for the representatives. The Greeks agreed that it is essential to protect the autonomy and mandate of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). However, they expressed some concern about the modalities for the annual human dimension implementation meeting, hinting at potential restrictions for some NGOs. We pushed back on this point. Finally, the Greeks were non-committal on the question of OSCE programs to train Afghan customs and border officials, saying that they did not want to compete with EC efforts. The Greeks also placed emphasis on maintaining an "evenhanded" approach with the Russians during their Chairmanship, but did not provide specifics. USOSCE and Embassy Athens will continue to press the Greeks on our OSCE agenda. End Summary.

Participants

¶3. (U)

Greece

-- Ambassador Christos Zaharakis, Future Special Envoy of the Chairman-in-Office;
-- Ambassador Nicolaos Kalantzianos, Director General for International Organizations and International Security and Cooperation, and head of the MFA OSCE Task Force;
-- Ambassador Mara Marinaki, Greek Permanent Representative to the OSCE;
-- Louis Abatis, DCM, Greek Mission to the OSCE;
-- Petros Averinos, Director, MFA D3 Directorate for OSCE and Council of Europe Affairs;
-- Nicolas Patakias, OSCE Coordinator, MFA D3 Directorate;
-- Nicolas Skembas, Attaché, MFA D3 Directorate;
-- Sotirios Demestichas, Attaché, MFA D3 Directorate.

United States

-- Ambassador Julie Finley, USOSCE;
-- Gary Robbins, Acting DAS, EUR;
-- Thomas Countryman, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy Athens;
-- Samuel Laeuchli, Political Counselor, USOSCE;
-- Jeff Hovenier, A/Political Counselor, Embassy Athens;
-- Diana Brown, Deputy Political Counselor, USOSCE

Tolerance Representatives -- Will Be Reappointed

14. (C) Ambassador Finley said the U.S. places great importance on the three personal representatives on tolerance, and pressed Greece to reappoint them during its Chairmanship. Ambassador Kalantzianos responded that Greece did indeed plan to appoint the three personal representatives, but he added that Greece had questions about the "personalities" involved and the "support structures." He provided no further information on which "personalities" among the current personal representatives on tolerance Greece may wish to review, but said that this was an issue that Greece would "follow-up" with the U.S. delegation in Vienna. On structures, he simply noted that the OSCE does not currently provide adequate support for the three personal representatives on tolerance, and he wanted to have further conversations with the United States and other key OSCE states on how the OSCE structures might better support the tolerance representatives. Ambassador Finley expressed U.S. readiness to consult further on this issue noting that she also believed that the tolerance representatives could benefit from greater administrative support from the OSCE, and she reiterated U.S. commitment to the three tolerance representatives.

ODIHR) Autonomy "Yes" / HDIM) some concerns

15. (C) Ambassador Finley emphasized that the U.S. places the highest priority on ensuring that ODIHR maintains its

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autonomy and mandate; the U.S. will oppose any efforts to diminish ODIHR, which is "the backbone of the OSCE." Zaharakis responded that Greece shares this view. Greece will not support any effort to restrict ODIHR's autonomy, particularly in the field of election observation, which he termed the OSCE's "crown jewel."

16. (C) Kalantzianos then noted that although Greece strongly supports ODIHR's autonomy, Greece does believe there could be utility in reviewing the modalities for the annual human dimension implementation meeting (HDIM), particularly with regard to the participation of some NGOs who at times raised "delicate issues." (He mentioned in particular the Aurelian religious group, whose "princess" claims to be an alien and attends the HDIM each year.) Averinos added that Greece is aware that many participating states are concerned by a "lack of geographic balance" among participating NGOs. Ambassador Finley pushed back on the idea of restricting participation by NGOs) no matter how much some may consider them to be on the "fringe." She added that the HDIM provides a rare opportunity for NGOs to speak freely, and the U.S. would oppose going down this dangerous path of implementing rules about which NGOs should attend. Robbins asked the Greeks to identify any specific elements of the HDIM modalities that are problematic, noting that we should not revise modalities simply in response to complaints. He suggested that perhaps the criticism that ODIHR is receiving is because it is doing its job so effectively, adding that we should be more concerned if there were no criticisms of ODIHR, given its mandate to promote human rights and compliance with OSCE commitments.

OSCE/Afghanistan) Tepid Response

17. (C) Ambassador Finley raised the issue of possible OSCE work in Afghanistan, focused on training border and customs officials. She noted that implementation of any such

decisions would likely take place during the Greek Chairmanship, and asked for full Greek commitment to achieving this result. Kalantzianos said that the European Commission is also reviewing how it can assist in Afghanistan and is considering providing border and customs training. It is important that the OSCE and the EC not duplicate efforts. We agreed, but reminded the Greeks that EC plans are more limited in scope than what the United States has proposed for the OSCE. Kalantzianos responded that Greece is "not negative" to ideas in this area, but said that Athens would get back to us on the issue of Greek support for OSCE customs/border training in Afghanistan.

¶18. (C) Comment: Greece's innate caution on this issue is largely driven by the Greek EU-centric view of European institutions. We would anticipate that Greece will not be prepared to be more positive about OSCE customs/border training in Afghanistan until/unless any possible, separate EC role is hammered out. End Comment.

Russia) Greek desire to be "evenhanded"

¶19. (C) In introductory remarks, Zaharakis said Greece will place particular importance during its Chairmanship to represent "all of the OSCE." In this regard, Greece will seek to be "evenhanded" in its dealings with Russia. Zaharakis did not provide any specifics on how Greece intends to achieve this goal. He said that as CiO, Greece will inevitably have to take positions that "do not satisfy all sides," adding that "evenhandedness is not always easy to achieve."

¶10. (C) Ambassador Finley responded that the United States also seeks a partnership with Russia, both bilaterally and at the OSCE. However, she cautioned that any effort to be "evenhanded" with regard to Russia should not cross red-lines or impede the OSCE's operational capabilities. She also emphasized that the United States continues to pursue and welcome close consultations with the CiO on all key issues on the OSCE agenda.

OSCE/Economic Dimension) Migration and Climate Change

¶11. (C) When asked about Greek plans for the Economic Dimension, Ambassador Marinaki said the Greek CiO plans to focus on migration, and in particular the relationship between climate change and migration and its impact on Europe. USOSCE suggested strongly that the Greeks focus on OSCE value-added areas instead, such as good governance, rule

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of law, and legislation. We added that the USG has been skeptical about OSCE involvement in climate change, given its lack of experience in this area.

Unresolved Conflicts

¶112. (C) When we raised the question of how Greece planned to manage its CiO responsibilities with regard to unresolved conflicts, the Greeks responded that Ambassador Zaharakis would be "responsible" as the "Special Envoy" of the CiO. He had nothing to add, other than to inquire as to U.S. views related to Kosovo and the prospects that it would also become an unresolved conflict.

Preparing and Managing Kazakhstan

¶113. (C) We suggested that Greece may have a particularly

important role to play in helping Kazakhstan to prepare for its 2010 Chairmanship. The Greeks agreed this would be an important priority, adding that they are already in frequent contact with the Kazakstanis. An unnamed Kazakstani Under Secretary will visit Athens next month to begin the consultation process.

¶14. (C) Ambassador MarinQish to see the mission "restructured." We underscored the importance of the mission's work in human rights, and cautioned that we will need to be very cautious about any effort to change the mission and should resist any Kazakstani attempt to close or diminish work in the human rights field. Marinaki countered that by selecting a nation to serve as CiO, the OSCE has already indicated that it is "satisfied" with its compliance with OSCE human rights commitments. We responded that we had a different view, and that the United States believes it essential to continue to use OSCE structures, including the mission in Kazakhstan, to help the Kazakstanis comply with their OSCE commitments.

Comment) Room for Improvement

¶15. (C) We scheduled these consultations to get the Greeks thinking early about their Chairmanship and to flag our highest priorities. In that regard, they were successful. The Greeks have been apprised of our priorities and they have begun organizing themselves for the Chairmanship earlier than they otherwise might have. However, we have some work ahead of us in getting the Greeks to back away from some problematic ideas on the HDIM, and to take a more proactive stance on Afghanistan. We are somewhat disquieted by their approach to managing the Russians at the OSCE and engaging Kazakhstan in advance of its OSCE Chairmanship. However, it is also clear that future CiO Bakoyannis has not yet taken an active role in OSCE preparations. We expect her to be an energetic and capable CiO and likely more responsive - at least in private - to U.S. desiderata at the OSCE than these consultations might suggest. As we get closer to the Greek Chairmanship, we will need to continue to press the Greek bureaucracy on our OSCE agenda and begin to make it part of our dialogue with Bakoyannis herself. End Comment.

¶16. (U) EUR Acting DAS Robbins has cleared this cable.
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